People serve tea between cars.	ing tea is the brightest spot of the day.
Paperboy	The jam may not suit anyone, but the paperboy is delighted. With everyone so close he can get through his rounds in a fraction of the time. The post-
Postman delivers mail.	man had a hard job at first coping with the number plates instead of name plates, but now the traffic-jam community is easing his task.
Mrs. Stacey's car	It's been a long weekend holiday for Mrs. Stacey. Now her fifteen-horsepower home is the smartest in the street. The kitchen is in the back; there's a telephone, and the television works off the car battery. At teatime Mrs. Stacey links up to the exhaust, lights the fumes, and pops on the kettle for a quick cup of tea.

It's marvelous stuff, and once again it shows what wit and imagination can do for a subject.

7 Beginning the First Draft

You are a few weeks into the film, and things are beginning to clarify in your mind. You have decided to do the film as story plus essay. You think that you have found the right approach and structure, and you are beginning to see a possible opening, middle, and end. Great! Now all you have to do is sit down and write your first draft. This may take the form of either a draft shooting script with ideas only, or a draft shooting script with commentary. In the first case you will merely set out the ideas you want to accompany the visuals. In the second case you will actually write a preliminary commentary, even though this may well change as the film progresses.

A draft shooting script with the ideas sketched out might look like this:

Visual	*Idea Line*
Jerusalem seen from the air.	The concept of Jerusalem as the highest ideal. Perfection. St. John's vision. Mention Jerusalem as religious center.
Crowded Jerusalem streets. People struggle against cars.	Jerusalem of the here and now. Discuss reality. A city of 25,000. The everyday problems.
Stand-up comments.	Commentator expresses the dilemma of modern Jerusalem. The tensions of the present. Balancing the spiritual and the practical. Where is the film going.

A draft shooting script with commentary might look like this:

Visual	*Audio*
Jerusalem seen from the air.	When he left Palestine in 1920 the British governor of the

	capital said, "After Jerusalem there can be no higher promotion."
	For him, as for millions of others, there was no counterpart to Jerusalem in the history of the West.
	Jerusalem was the center of two faiths and holy to a third. It was the light. The guardian of ideals. The eternal city. The symbol of perfection.
Jerusalem seen on the ground. Crowded streets. People push against cars. Chaos.	But as well as the Jerusalem of the mind, there is also the Jerusalem of reality. There is the modern city developed in the last century, and the ancient city where 25,000 people still live and work within medieval fortress walls.

Which of the two forms should you choose? The answer is usually forced on you by the circumstances and by the nature of the film. Most sponsors, in a fairly simple situation, like to receive a full commentary script even though they know it will most likely change at a later date. Often the visuals or a list of ideas means little to them. By contrast, it is very easy to understand the film through the commentary. Even a television documentary department, familiar with all sorts of presentations, may require a full commentary script before letting you do a history or personality film. And the same may be true of foundations to whom you have applied for a grant. For many films, however, it is quite clear that you will only be able to write the commentary at the end. These may be political films, news documentaries, or any films that are constantly evolving or that are essentially built in the editing phase. In such cases the best you can do is set out the ideas you want to use to guide you through the film and write the commentary when the editing is finished.

When I have both options, I prefer to write a first draft (for my eyes only) using the idea form, then rewrite the script with commentary for presentation. This double work is not strictly necessary, but I find that it helps me concentrate my ideas.

Script Formats

By now you probably have a good idea of what the standard script format looks like because of all the examples so far. The usual practice is to divide your page into two sections, with the visuals described on the left side of the page and the audio portion (commentary or ideas) on the right, as below.

Visual	*Audio*
Ascot race track. Horse enclosure. Elegant people seen in fancy suits and dresses watching.	Once this was known as the sport of kings. And you came because you had wealth and leisure and wanted to show off your mistress.
Other working-class types, drinking beer and eating hamburgers and dressed in jeans and old trousers.	Now the sport of kings has become the pastime of the proletariat.

As you can see, although the commentary is fairly detailed, the visuals are only sketched in. What you are trying to do is give the director a broad idea of what you want from the visuals, leaving the rest up to him or her. Obviously, some pictures will call for more details. Thus, for a scientific or medical film you may have to describe precisely the handling of a technical shot. But usually a brief suggestion is enough. A rough sketch will also suffice for "idea" scripts. Usually I don't bother to set out my ideas in long, elaborate sentences—just a few words to suggest the main ideas.

Does the script have to follow the divided page format? Not really. It's just that we're used to this convention. However, if you want to write your visuals across the full page and follow that with the commentary, then go ahead. The only criterion is clarity: will the ideas in the script be clear to those working on the film? If they are, then you have no problem.

When you start writing the actual script it may help you to jot down a few notes under the following headings:

1. Main ideas
2. Logical progression
3. Visualization
4. Opening
5. Rhythm and pace
6. Climax

This kind of analysis works well for me, though many of my friends plunge straight into writing without any such breakdown. It has become second nature for them to consider all these things in their mind, so they do not need to formalize their thinking. It is important to remember, though, that every script writer, formally or informally, consciously or unconsciously, has to consider most of the issues set out above.

Your first aim is for the script to present your key ideas in the most interesting and fascinating way. Furthermore, you want them to be seen as a whole rather than as a diverse collection of fragmented thoughts. And you want the ideas to move forward through the film with an easy and seemingly effortless logic and progression.

The problem boils down to this: What ideas will you use and how are you going to present them? Your research has churned up a hundred ideas. Now you are going to have to sift them, focusing on some and eliminating others, always keeping in mind the main goal of the picture. If, for example, you started researching the university film your overall list of ideas might include the following:

What does the university represent?

- originally for religious and legal training
- status: Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale
- a waste of time
- a focus of resentment for non-university people
- a generator of ideas
- a featherbed life for pampered faculty
- a hotbed of political unrest
- a marriage market
- the ivory tower
- a center for intellectual stimulation
- abundant sex.

The first task is to winnow out your ideas, concentrating only on those you deem of major importance. In the process some great ideas will be thrown out of the window, but that can't be helped. From the list above perhaps only three ideas will find their way into the script.

At this point it is useful to keep your audience in mind. Will they be interested in or able to understand all the issues you want to deal with? How much detail should you provide on each idea? Should you go into depth? Many executives in the American networks tend to believe their audiences are idiots capable of understanding only a few ideas, and then only if they are presented in the most superficial way. I disagree. I think most audiences can quickly grasp a great number of ideas, even complex ones, provided the film is attractively made.

At this stage it is also useful to remind yourself that no matter how many ideas you have, there must be one binding thread running through the film. Often this idea will be framed in the form of a question that the film will attempt to answer. Are universities good or bad for the country? Has Kennedy been misjudged by history? Was Irving Berlin the greatest popular composer of the century? Who was the real Hemingway? Does this sound familiar? It should: this statement of the main idea was the first thing you did when you wrote out your proposal all those months ago.

Having decided on the main ideas, the next task is to arrange them into logical blocks or sequences that lead easily and naturally from one to the other. By *sequence* we mean a series of shots joined by some common elements—a series of ideas, a visual setting, a series of actions, a musical motif—that make one or more specific points.

The shots in a sequence may be unified by

1. *A central idea:* We see children playing football in a park; a woman throwing a javelin; a professional baseball game; a wrestling match. The sports motif is the obvious unifying element, but the central idea that the writer wants to make might be that sport originates in war.
2. *Setting:* We see the Rocky Mountains. Tremendous mountains, waterfalls, and streams. Immense forests. Impenetrable jungles. Here the common element is the setting and the grandeur of nature.
3. *Action:* A student leaves her house, goes to the university, greets her friends, has coffee, then finally enters class. All the actions up to the class entry make for a certain unity, whereas a classroom shot would probably begin a different sequence.
4. *Mood:* War has begun. Tanks are advancing. Women are weeping. Destroyed buildings are seen in silhouette. Men are talking in groups. A small boy wanders forlornly along a street. Here the binding element is not just the start of war (idea) but also the gray, bleak mood of the people and the setting.

Obviously there are more categories and they overlap considerably. Ideas, actions, setting, central characters, mood—all these things may join together to unify a sequence. Another way of looking at it is to think of groups of ideas, images, and information that suggest a totality, a unified block. This will give you the sequence, and later you can see where the sequence fits into the whole.

You must continually ask yourself

- What is the *point* I want to make in this sequence?
- What can I *show* to make that point?
- How will *sound*, whether music, dialogue, effects, or commentary, help make the sequence more effective?

In practice you will probably be using your narration to unify the sequence and show the viewer where you want to put your emphasis.

When you start thinking about putting your sequences in some kind of order, keep two points in mind. First, remember that there is a tremendous difference between film logic and mathematical logic. The former is much more elusive, emotional, and insubstantial. It is a logic that is often felt through the gut rather than through the head. I recently saw a film about the world-famous cellist Jaqueline du Pré, who died very young. The writer-director might have started the picture with du Pré triumphant in

concert and then gone back to her childhood. Instead, the film opens with Elgar's cello concerto being heard over soft, warm shots of autumn, with views of the sun sparkling through red and orange leaves. The director had opted for a gentle, poetic opening and it worked, even though the real entry into the subject was somewhat delayed. The second point is that the progressive logic of the ideas has to parallel the visual and emotional development of the film. Emphasis on one at the expense of the others can ruin the film.

The simplest and most natural ordering of ideas is chronological, but one might also want to consider a spatial development. The main thing is to find an order that gives a sense of growth. In his excellent book on scriptwriting for feature films, Dwight Swain suggests thinking about movement from the simple to the complex, from the specific to the general, from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from problem to solution, or from cause to effect. The important thing is the suggestion or illusion of inevitability, of natural movement.

The chronological progression, the oldest form of storytelling, is the most frequently used because it satisfies our natural curiosity to see what happens next. If we are introduced to a gifted child, we want to know what becomes of that child in adulthood. We want to know what happens when the sheltered girl who has been confined to her family circle takes her first room alone. We want to see the nun in the cloisters, then follow her progress when she gives up her vows and returns to the secular world. Jon Else's Academy Award-winning film *The Day after Trinity* tells the story of Robert Oppenheimer and the events leading to the creation of the atomic bomb. The basis is the simple chronological story of Oppenheimer's life from childhood to maturity to the supervision of the Los Alamos atomic project. Similarly, Don Pennebaker's *Jane* starts with Jane Fonda arriving for her first Broadway rehearsals and concludes with the arrival of the reviews after the disastrous opening night.

Another progression is the crisis, conflict, and resolution structure discussed earlier in reference to *The Chair*. At first glance this progression looks similar to the chronological structure, but there are quite a few differences. For example, one of the familiar strategies of the chronological film is to show the development of character or the growth of a career in politics, business, or the arts such as that of Oppenheimer in *The Day after Trinity*. The same may happen in a conflict documentary, but in the latter case we are generally more interested in the conflict resolution than in the character change.

The action in *The Chair* takes place over five days; time passes, but there is no character change. Instead, the tension concerning Paul's fate propels the film forward. Will he live or die? That's the answer we are waiting for. In *Mooney versus Fowler*, by James Lipscomb, we follow the lives of two extrovert football coaches and the struggle between their two teams for the local championship. Once the game is over and the conflict resolved, the film ends.

A good example of another film based on the progression of a fight is the BBC film *Whose House Is It Anyway?* In England most people cherish the myth that their home is their castle, sacred and inviolable. But evidently it isn't. If the local council wants the house for a good reason, it's theirs. Billy and Gordon Howard had owned and lived in Rose Cottage for years, but one day the local council placed a compulsory purchase order on the house and assumed ownership. The eccentric bachelor brothers, aged sixty-five and seventy-three, refused to recognize the validity of the purchase order, saying that when the bailiffs came they would shoot them rather than give up their birthright. The conflict is established in the first few seconds of the film, and the next hour shows us the stages and progress of the fight. It is a subject that touches all of us, and we are immediately drawn into the film, curious to see how the conflict will be resolved.

The chronological progression and the conflict progression are the two most common documentary threads, followed closely by the *search* motif, or the hunt for the solution of the mystery. Hence the popularity of the "Discovery" series, which investigated everything from the origins of the Dracula story to archaeologist Schliemann's search for Troy.

James Burke's series "Connections," mentioned previously, is really a variation on the search theme. Instead of filming a deliberate search, his aim is to show us how technological discovery is often achieved in the most unexpected ways. His films progress from surprise A to surprise B and so on. Watching the series is like watching a magician astonish an audience, pulling wonders out of a hat. Burke's secret is to stimulate our curiosity into following a strange series of technological changes. For amusement I charted the progress of ideas in Burke's film about the invention of rocket propulsion:

1. The film opens. Burke stands in a modern factory and talks about the many uses of *plastic*.
2. This leads him to talk about *plastic credit cards* replacing money.
3. We now slip into a discussion of *financial credit*.
4. That subject takes us back to the fourteenth century. While the film shows us knights and ladies playing around in castle grounds, Burke starts telling us how the *new idea of credit* in those days helped finance the small army of the Duke of Burgundy.
5. Because of *credit* the *army can grow* from a few thousand to sixty thousand—that is, credit allows bigger armies.
6. As armies grow new weapons come into fashion. The pike is used in a new way, but then it gives way to the blunderbuss, which gives way to the musket. Then the pike joins the musket in the form of the bayonet.
7. We return to the idea of the *ever-growing army* now two hundred to three hundred thousand soldiers strong. But armies need *food*.
8. Armies like that of Napoleon grow so large that they cannot live off

the countryside. They need food that can be eaten even if not fresh. This leads to the *development of canning*.
9. This in turn leads to *ice-making machines*, which in turn inspire the invention of chemical and gas *refrigeration* and *refrigerators*.
10. The growing emphasis on food preservation leads to the invention of the *vacuum flask*.
11. The principle of the vacuum flask allows gases to explode in a vacuum. Do this on a large scale and you have the invention of the V-2 rocket by Werner von Braun.

One is a little staggered at the end of the film to find that food for armies has led to rocket propulsion. You wonder how the trick was done. The answer is the fascinating but logical thread of ideas that Burke has woven for the viewers.

Burke's film was built up of about eleven sections that seem to lead inevitably from one to the other. I say "seem" because on close examination we can detect a terrific sleight of hand. But what do you do when the film has no superficial logic? The answer is to build up blocks of associated ideas, then segue smoothly, with the help of visuals and commentary, from one distinct section to another.

When I did a film about automobile accidents, I knew I wanted to concentrate on four things: the accidents as they happen; the reactions of the victims; the causes of accidents; and road engineering. There seemed to be no compelling arguments for placing one topic before another. So what were the reasons behind the final arrangement of the script?

I put road engineering first because it raised some interesting issues but lacked the emotional interests for a film climax. On the other hand, I thought I could get some highly moving and dramatic material on drivers that would work well toward the end. The section on cars would then slip into the middle. The script was written that way until I turned up some fascinating material on cars of the future that I thought would lead easily into the question of where we will go in the twenty-first century. That seemed a good way to end the film, so I reversed the sections on cars and drivers. The first and very rough draft of ideas and sequences was as follows:

Visual	*Ideas*
Cars on the road.	The trauma of the accident.
Crash, police.	
Ambulance.	Title: *Always Someone Else*
Hospital. Patient's subjective view.	
Patients interviewed in hospital.	Victims' reactions.

Visual	*Ideas*
	Accident background
Urban congestion.	City crowding.
Mases of traffic.	The problem of movement.
Inside police lab. Police tests at scene of accident.	How police investigate accidents.
	Why Accidents Happen
Bad road engineering. Death spots. Blind Spots. Discussion with road engineer.	(a) *Bad road engineering*. The state of the roads.
	(b) *The driver.*
Talk to bus and taxi drivers. Training course for bad drivers.	Not taking care.
Training new drivers. Specialist training.	Driver training.
Bad visibility. Crowded car. Bad signs. Psychological pressure.	Pressures on drivers.
Sports car. Racing. Big cars and beautiful women.	Car as extension of the psyche. The psychology of cars and driving.
	(c) *The car itself.*
Impact tests on cars. Cars on test courses. Safety belt tests.	Building the car. Its faults. New safety measures
Innovative car designs Cars with reverse seats and periscope mirrors.	The car of the future.
Animated film with new cars and well-designed, car-accommodating cities.	The world of the future.
Wrecks of cars in a salvage yard.	Need for concern now.

What I have set out above was actually fourteen pages long. Very much a first sketch, it nevertheless set out clearly how the visuals and ideas would work together. I knew that later scripts would require much more detail and that the shooting itself would suggest new patterns and variations. However, I needed to put some ideas on paper so that I could react to them and see whether the order made sense, at least in theory.

It is also worthwhile pointing out that certain sections were included not because I thought they were logically necessary to some thesis I was

developing, but because I thought they were visually interesting and might be fun to shoot. The scene in the police accident lab, for example, did not contribute much by way of ideas, but it was a marvelous place to poke around and look at lie detectors, secret camera units, methods of metal testing, and so on. The jazzy sequence, with a beautiful blond on top of a Rolls-Royce, also was not strictly necessary, but I thought it would give a certain visual relief.

What is important is that the first draft suggested a tentative order and connection between sequences that were really quite disparate. It was a beginning. In the end the editing suggested quite a radical reordering, but that's a story for the editing chapter.

Typical Problems

In looking for logic in your scriptwriting, you will often find yourself being pulled in different directions by the variety of possibilities. The most common problem is trying to decide whether to proceed chronologically, intellectually, or spatially. What is all this about in practice? Let's consider a chronological progression versus an intellectual progression.

You are doing a film about World War II and want to bring in the subject of civilian resistance. Your general story has taken you to 1942. You then find four or five stories you want to use about resistance, one in 1942, one in 1944, and one in 1945. In terms of ideas, you probably want to tell all the stories in one sequence to prove a certain point about resistance. But that will carry you to 1945, whereas the main part of your film has only reached 1942. So you have a problem.

In the same film you are showing the D day invasion of June 1944. Your idea line suddenly pulls you into a discussion of other successful and less successful attacks in the war, such as the Dieppe raid and the Italian invasion. Do you branch out and show those incidents, or do you stay with the scenes on the Normandy beaches?

There are no easy answers. I tend to ask myself a few questions: Will what I am doing confuse the viewer? Will it aid or spoil the dramatic and emotional telling of the story? Will it affect the overall rhythm of the film? In nine cases out of ten I find it best to keep within a chronological progression and to stay with one physical location until the information about it is exhausted. There are exceptions, but these guidelines seem to be the most helpful in practice.

8 Completing the First Draft

Visualization

You have worked out a story line and idea line. Now comes the fun as you start considering how to put over your ideas visually. Every sequence has a point or a number of points that can be put over by visuals, by commentary, or by a combination of both. Your aim is to find the most powerful way to use the joint forces of both picture and word. As the film proceeds it makes a series of assertions. Today the car is god; the famine in Ethiopia is tragic beyond all belief; the youngsters of today are crazier than their parents ever were. These statements need illustrating in order to prove their truth. They can be illustrated in comic or serious ways, but they must be proved. So one of the first jobs is to choose the pictures that will prove your points in the most imaginative and interesting way.

The job of visualization is shared between the writer and the director. The writer will suggest the action and visualization but knows that the director, on location, may add to or alter the suggestion or think of a better way of putting over the idea. But the script visualization is always the starting point and is usually a tremendous help to the director.

In my automobile accident film one of the points I wanted to make was that the car often becomes an extension of one's personality. It can represent power, sex, virility. In the film the point was made visually as follows:

Visual	*Audio*
Very low shots of the road surface rushing past. The road blurs at speed. We cut to racing cars speeding round a track. Women wave the cars on.	In my car I feel like a real guy. There's power in my hands. My girl's at my side. Put my foot down and I can get from San Francisco to Monterey in an hour. In my car I get really turned on. You're just not a man without a car.